



## Bellevue Commission Votes to Make All City Parks and Recreational Areas Smoke-Free

Bellevue, FL – In a move to promote public health and protect the well-being of residents and visitors, the Bellevue City Commission officially voted, at the April 1, 2025 meeting, to make all city parks and recreational areas smoke-free. The newly adopted policy prohibits the smoking of all tobacco products, electronic cigarettes, and vaping devices in city-owned outdoor spaces.

This important step ensures that community gathering spots—including Lake Lillian Park, Lake Lillian Playground, Cherokee Park, the Lake Lillian Community Center and Grounds, the Wilma Loar Splash Park, the park between the splash pad and Lake Lillian, the Mary Ann Cafaro Community Garden, Fred King Park, the Kenneth Smith Nature Trail, the Grotto, the Sports Complex and the City Hall Park—remain safe, clean, and healthy environments for all who visit.

Mayor Christine Dobkowski highlighted the significance of the commission's decision, stating:

*"Public spaces should be places where families can gather, children can play, and residents can enjoy the outdoors without the harmful effects of secondhand smoke. Scientific research is clear: there is no safe level of exposure to secondhand smoke. This measure is about more than just policy—it's about protecting the health and quality of life of everyone in Bellevue. We are taking an important step in fostering a cleaner, healthier, and more family-friendly city for generations to come."*

The City of Bellevue recognizes the critical need for smoke-free environments, particularly in spaces where children and families gather. Secondhand smoke exposure is a known health hazard, linked to serious respiratory conditions, heart disease, and cancer. Additionally, vaping and e-cigarettes—often marketed as safer alternatives—have been shown to contain harmful substances that pose risks to both users and bystanders.

### Why a Smoke-Free Policy Matters

The Commission's decision is backed by compelling research demonstrating the dangers of smoking, vaping, and secondhand exposure:

1. Secondhand smoke is harmful, even outdoors. The U.S. Surgeon General has confirmed that secondhand smoke contains over 7,000 chemicals, including at least 70 carcinogens (cancer-causing agents). Exposure can increase the risk of heart disease, stroke, and lung cancer, even in nonsmokers. (<https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/>)
2. E-cigarettes and vaping are not risk-free. Studies show that the aerosol from vaping devices contains toxic chemicals, heavy metals, and nicotine, which can harm lung tissue and contribute to long-term respiratory issues, especially in young people. (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2018)
3. Children are especially vulnerable. Exposure to secondhand smoke is linked to increased risks of asthma, respiratory infections, and even sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS) in infants. Smoke-free policies help prevent early exposure to harmful substances. (AAP, 2021)
4. Smoking-related litter is a major environmental hazard. Cigarette butts are the most commonly littered item worldwide and can take up to 10 years to decompose. They leach toxic chemicals into the soil and water, harming wildlife and polluting parks, lakes, and playgrounds. (Truth Initiative, 2022)
5. Smoke-free spaces improve overall community health. Studies show that when public spaces go smoke-free, smoking rates decline, reducing health risks for everyone and leading to lower healthcare costs and cleaner public areas. (American Lung Association, 2023)

## A Cleaner, Healthier Bellevue

Mariah Moody, Bellevue City Administrator, emphasized the city's commitment to public health, stating:

*"We are proud to take this step in making Bellevue's parks and community spaces safer and more enjoyable for everyone. A smoke-free environment isn't just about reducing exposure to secondhand smoke—it's about fostering a healthier lifestyle for our residents and visitors. By creating a clean, welcoming, and family-friendly atmosphere, we are reinforcing our city's commitment to wellness and environmental responsibility. We appreciate the community's support as we move forward with this initiative."*

To support the transition to smoke-free spaces, the City of Bellevue will be installing clear signage throughout parks and recreational areas to inform visitors of the new regulations. The city also encourages residents to help uphold the policy by spreading awareness and respectfully reminding others of the smoke-free status.

The smoke-free policy takes effect immediately and applies to all visitors at the designated city parks and recreation sites. This initiative aligns Bellevue with a growing number of cities nationwide that are taking proactive steps to create cleaner, healthier outdoor spaces. By making all city parks and recreational areas smoke-free, Bellevue continues to put the health, safety, and quality of life of its residents first.